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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: Jordan Reacts to Iraq Cholera "Outbreak" with Heightened Screening Processes for People and Food

REF: Baghdad 2928

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. In response to reports of isolated cases of cholera in various areas of Iraq, the Government of Jordan had directed the medical screening of people arriving from Iraq. It has also imposed a temporary ban on the import of non-canned food products from Iraq. The number of reported cases varies depending on who is reporting and the degree of seriousness remains open to question. End summary.

¶2. (U) Press accounts in Jordan have reported the banning of food imports (other than canned goods) into Jordan for the next two months due to concerns over possible contamination from an "outbreak" of cholera in neighboring Iraq. The Government of Jordan (GoJ) instituted this ban on September 10, noting that similar measures taken in 2007 were effective in helping prevent the spread of the disease at that time.

¶3. (SBU) The Jordanian Ministry of Health (MoH) subsequently announced on September 12 that all passengers arriving to Jordan from Iraq would need to complete a questionnaire and submit it to a "health squad" at all Jordanian ports-of-entry. If indications of cholera are found, the individual would be sent to a local hospital, at GoJ expense, for laboratory testing. So far only Iraqis have been subjected to this screening. A MoH representative commented to EmbOffs that while Jordan has not yet actually discovered a case of cholera among arriving Iraqis, and little would actually change in day-to-day activities, this screening procedure would remain in effect for two months.

¶4. (SBU) World Health Organization (WHO), the UN, and Embassy Baghdad (reftel) are aware of the health threat, but none indicated serious concerns. The most recent information indicates that as of 28 September there are 340 confirmed cases, with five fatalities. This remains significantly less than in 2007 when, by the end of September, there were reportedly more than 1,400 confirmed cases. Note: The September 2007 outbreak resulted in a total of 4,696 cases and 28 deaths. End note. A WHO report dated September 10, noted that as the overall quality of water and sanitation in Iraq remains poor, cholera infection/contamination/outbreak is possible.

¶5. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Baghdad.

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